

Pandemic

A disease outbreak that spreads rapidly around the world.

Influenza

An infection of the lungs caused by a virus that can be passed from person to person.

Seasonal Influenza

A common form of influenza that spreads each winter. Flu shots protect many people from becoming infected.

Avian Influenza

Also called “bird flu.” A type of flu that affects poultry and wild birds. Humans can get this type of flu through close contact with infected birds. Avian influenza cannot be spread from person to person.



From the Secretary of Health

Most of us are familiar with influenza or “the flu” that comes each year, but there is another type of flu as well. It begins in birds or animals and then passes to humans. It has the

potential to make millions sick in our country and around the world, and it could be far more deadly than the seasonal flu.

Many health experts believe the current avian flu outbreak that began in Asia could start the next worldwide flu pandemic. We cannot be certain of that, but we know flu pandemics happen regularly. We need to be ready, and as recent events have shown, it is wise to be prepared for the worst. That will take the people of our communities, business and government working together.

This guide is designed to answer some of your questions about a flu pandemic and to suggest simple things you can do to prepare. Taking precautions like washing your hands, covering your cough and avoiding others when you are sick are surprisingly powerful ways to fight the spread of disease. Knowing what could happen is the first step toward being prepared.

I hope you will take the time to read through this information, share it with others and take action. You can make a difference, and help keep Washington safe and healthy.



Mary C. Selecky
Secretary of Health

What to do

At home

Keep these items in your home

- **Enough food and water per person for a week or more**—Choose foods that will keep for a long time and do not require refrigeration or cooking. Include a non-electric can opener.
- **Medications**—Keep at least a week’s supply of the medicines you take regularly.
- **Items to relieve flu symptoms**—Stock medicines for fever, such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen. Cold packs, blankets and humidifiers will also be useful. Have extra water and fruit juices on hand in case someone is sick—the flu virus causes dehydration, and drinking extra fluids helps.
- **Items for personal comfort**—Store at least a week’s supply of soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toilet paper and cleaning products.
- **Activities for yourself and your children**—Include books, crafts, board games, art supplies and other things to do. Include things that do not require electricity.
- **Cash**—Banks may not always be open and cash machines may not always work.
- **Pet supplies**—Remember food, water and litter.
- **Cell phone or regular phone with a cord**—Cordless phones will not work if the power is out.
- **Large trash bags**—Garbage service may be disrupted or postponed for many days.

Make household and family emergency plans

- Agree on a point of contact where all family members can check in if you are separated during an emergency.
- Decide who will take care of children if schools are closed.
- Plan to limit the number of trips you take to shop or to run errands. Also, remember public transportation routes and times may be limited.
- Think about how you would care for people in your family who have disabilities if support services are not available.
- Be prepared to get by for at least a week on what you have at home. Stores may not be open or may have limited supplies.

PUBLIC HEALTH
ALWAYS WORKING FOR A SAFER AND
HEALTHIER WASHINGTON

Washington State Department of Health

Preparing for Pandemic Influenza

A personal and family guide

There are things you can do to get ready

- **Know what to expect**
- **Protect your health**
- **Stock your home for emergencies**
- **Make a plan for your household and family**

What it is

An influenza pandemic is a worldwide outbreak of a new flu virus

An influenza—or flu—pandemic is an outbreak of a new type of flu virus that spreads rapidly from one country to another. The new virus affects only birds or animals at first,

but gradually changes to affect people as well. A pandemic begins when the new flu virus is easily passed from person to person.

A flu pandemic will be more serious than the seasonal flu

Not as many people get sick from seasonal flu because people have developed some immunity to the virus and because so many protect themselves by getting flu shots. However, a pandemic would be caused by a new type of flu virus. People would have no immunity to it and no vaccine would exist to prevent it.

Flu pandemics happen

Flu viruses are everywhere and they change constantly. At some time in the future it is very likely that a flu virus will change in a way that causes a pandemic. Currently, health officials are concerned about the avian flu virus in Asia and Europe, because it could change and spread easily from person to person. No one knows when the next flu

pandemic will happen; large pandemics occurred in 1918, 1957, and 1968. Far more people travel today than in the past, which makes it easier for diseases to spread quickly around the world. A flu outbreak in another country may be just an airplane ride away from the United States.



Troops packed into ships returning from World War I carried a new flu virus home with them. It spread rapidly, killing 500,000 people in the United States and 40 million worldwide.



Hundreds of thousands of people travel between countries each day—significantly more than even 30 years ago. A highly contagious flu virus could spread worldwide much faster than earlier pandemics.

What to expect

If an outbreak occurs

No one knows how bad the next flu pandemic will be, but everyone should be prepared for the worst.

- It may be difficult to get medical care. Large numbers of sick people may overwhelm hospitals and clinics. Doctors and nurses will get sick, too, so hospitals and clinics may be short-staffed.
- Supplies and services will be limited. Many people will be unable to work, affecting how long businesses, banks, government offices and other services are open.
- You may be asked to stay away from others. Staying home will help stop the spread of the virus. Events may be canceled, and theaters and schools closed. If necessary, health officials will issue orders to keep people who have the virus separated from others.
- It will take months to develop a vaccine against the new virus, so flu shots will not be immediately available.

In your community

Know your neighbors. Talk with family, friends and neighbors to make sure everyone is prepared. Be ready to help neighbors who are elderly or have special needs if services they depend on are not available.

At work

You may not be able to go to work. Staying home from work when you are sick is the most important thing you can do to protect others.

Know policies. Ask your employer or union about sick leave and policies about absences, time off and telecommuting.

Encourage planning. Every business, organization and agency should have a plan for making sure essential work can get done if large numbers of employees are

- Medicines for flu symptoms may be in short supply.
- Travel may be difficult. Routes and schedules for buses, trains or planes may change or be restricted. Gasoline may also be in short supply.
- You may be asked to wear a mask. Masks may be required in hospitals, clinics or doctors' offices, as well as other places that are open to the public.
- A flu pandemic could last a long time. The 1918 flu pandemic lasted 18 months. In some cases, pandemics weaken for a while and then recur.
- Health officials will keep you informed. They will work with the media to provide timely information and advice. Web sites from government health agencies will also have updated information.

Know school policies. Know policies about illnesses and being absent. Be prepared for school closures. Make a plan for taking care of your children if schools are not open for long periods.

absent over many months. You may be asked to perform duties that are not typically part of your job.

Explore other ways to get your work done. When people are ill, find ways to reduce personal contact such as increased use of e-mails or phone conferences.

What to do

Protect your health

Prevent the spread of germs

The flu virus is spread from person to person when an infected person coughs, sneezes or touches things that others use. Do these simple, effective things to help protect yourself and others:

Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. It is best not to use your bare hand. Cough into your sleeve or cover your mouth and nose with a tissue.

Wash your hands. The best way to protect yourself from viruses is to wash your hands often. Soap and water are best, but when they are not available, use alcohol-based hand gel or disposable wipes.

Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth. The flu virus is often spread when a person touches something that has the virus on it and then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth.

Stay home when you're sick or have flu

symptoms. Drink extra water, get plenty of rest and check with a health care provider as needed.

Home care

Learn basic care-giving. Know how to care for someone with a fever, body aches and lung congestion. During a flu pandemic you will be provided with specific instructions for caring for those who are sick as well as information about when to call a health care provider.

Learn how to recognize and treat dehydration. Watch for weakness, fainting, dry mouth, dark concentrated urine, low blood pressure or a fast pulse when lying or sitting down. These are signs of dehydration. The flu virus causes the body to lose water through fever and sweating. To prevent dehydration, it is very important for a person with the flu to drink a lot of water—up to 12 glasses a day.

Learn more

Washington State Department of Health — www.doh.wa.gov/panflu/

Local public health agencies in Washington state — www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services — www.pandemicflu.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) — www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/

World Health Organization (WHO) — www.who.int

This publication is available electronically in English and Spanish on our Web site (www.doh.wa.gov/panflu/). Related fact sheets are also available in Chinese, Korean, Russian and Vietnamese at the same Web address.



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